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A LITTLE NIGHT-MUSIC

John F. Deane<sup>1</sup>  
Achill Island, Ireland

He came in from his desert, a little crazed,  
knowing how heart and mind can be slitherful.  
Now he suffers sleeplessness, sometimes chilled  
in shop doorways, sometimes out under irksome stars.  
A man's life, we know, is a flash-past, a demi-semi-quaver  
in a Paganini allegretto. At times the only presence  
is the whistle of the night-wind round churchyard corners.  
That he stands firm and comes amongst us, offering  
forgiveness, is belief beyond belief, the goad of love,  
echo of our avant-garde, our crazy musician of a God.

1. John F. Deane was born on Achill Island, Ireland in 1943. He founded *Poetry Ireland* in 1978, and is the recipient of the O'Shaughnessy Award for Irish Poetry and the Marten Toonder Award for Literature. His numerous collections include *Snow Falling on Chestnut Hill: New and Selected Poems* (2012) and *Dear Pilgrims* (2018) both from Carcanet Press.

THE PLACING OF A WHITE STONE

John F. Deane  
Achill Island, Ireland

Snowlight on winter-hardened ground;  
font-water cold, and I  
just a cry away from my private  
'in-the-beginning'. I am –

after fourteen billion years. You always are  
who are. I was set to learn  
love's demands and blandishments. Now  
on a wind-shattered headland, I say

your name – Yeshua – the water-walker;  
here are the humps of hungry grass,  
one white stone for each lost child  
and nobody on earth to know their names.

Across hardened ground of our wars  
too many rows of white crosses; while I –  
by-the-wind-sailor John – am facing  
into my final birthing. 'To those

who come through,' the Spirit says,  
'I will give a white stone, their name  
written secretly upon it'.  
The centuries have grown

virulent, and the soil  
weary. And I have offered poems, petitionary,  
like prayers, like small  
white stones placed

on rough ground.

## CONSIDERING

John F. Deane  
Achill Island, Ireland

Many sparrows have been chortling in the gutter-dust, working  
at nests with twigs and the numbered hairs of your head.

Among lilies of the field and in the dunes, the landrail has been  
scraping metal across the corrugated iron of the dusk.

In the long night-time one is island, rooted to the seabed, glad  
that the tides are constant, and the slipway wet with limpets.

These nights, my eyes come open suddenly and too often, onto  
darkness, bringing moments of a searing solitude,

awareness of the crawling of constellations over the black  
wildernesses of space.

You can hear in the distance the long-lost monks in their  
ceaseless Gregorian chants of praise while I am naming

flowers of the island, from Aaron's beard to yarrow, to know  
how the wonder of our daily bread cannot matter, yet how it  
does.